

Freudianism in "frankenstein": an analysis of the human nature

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Erin Erkocevic

8 December 2010

An Analysis of Human Nature in Frankenstein, As it Connects to Freudian Psychology

In her novel Frankenstein, Mary Shelley skillfully laces a chilling tale of horror with social commentary to create an exploration of human nature that unfolds alongside with the story. The novel opens with Robert Walton and Victor Frankenstein's mad quests for scientific glory. Both of these men are hell-bent on obtaining glory in the field of science. Both of these men are slaves to the basic human curiosity, specifically, the Id, which is the darkest part of the human psyche. The Id represents the long list of a human being's primal demands and needs immediate satisfaction. For Victor, his curiosity, results in his creation of the monster, the literal incarnation of his Id. The second aspect of this theme in Frankenstein is that there will always be a conflict between the creator and the created. In terms of Freudian Psychology, there will always be a conflict between the Ego and the Id. The monster represents the purest form of Id, and Victor, the creator, has some responsibility to bestow some sense of conscience, or Ego, upon his creation. However, Freud describes the rooted conflict between the Ego and the Id, and the monster eventually repulses Victor's Ego to the point that he cannot stand the sight of his own creation. Thirdly, Human Nature is the driving force of all human beings' destructive behavior. The most basic part of human nature fails both creator and creation, because the Id is the fall of both. The Id is the driving force of Victor's demise because of his mad quest

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to start a new species. He indulges that desire to the fullest, and the product of this desire ruins his life and kills his closest friends and family. The Monster is just an unfortunate product of one man's insane drive for glory. The creature has no conscience, because he is not possible of possessing one. Frankenstein tries and tries, however, he relapses into the position that he was born into, The incarnation of Id. Within the basic Ego of Man, Id is destined to be reviled for his concrete existence. The discussion of human nature in Frankenstein is well-connected to the idea of the human mind that Freud presents in his theories of Psychology. The three arguments presented correspond to the beginning, middle, and end of the novel, and the developments of the plot that occur at the various points. Freud's first point, which corresponds directly to the beginning of Frankenstein, is that there is a basic curiosity to human nature that is solely devoted to the Id, and that that curiosity, when overindulged, will unleash misfortune upon the one in question. Secondly, Freud believes that there will always be a conflict between the Ego and the Id, which aligns with the plot in the middle portion of the novel. Third and finally, the essences of human nature will eventually lead to the species' encroaching demise, as occurs at the end of the novel.

Curiosity, a natural part of human desire, drives us to explore the far reaches of our universe, open new doors, make stunning new discoveries, and take turns into the new realms of knowledge. This curiosity goes hand in hand with the desire for glory. The desire for glory is present in Victor's hubristic want to have " a new species bless [him] as its creator and source" (Shelley 48). This supreme pride that has enveloped that thought is almost

Shakespearian in the way that it exposes the sordid pride of a tragic character. In this statement, Victor issues his purpose and predicts his downfall. He was to create a new species of being so " many happy and excellent natures would owe their existence to [him]" (Shelley, 48). This statement is ironic. He hopes his new race will have the most amiable qualities. However, he succeeds in creating an atrocity that is the fabrication of that which humanity was to revile, the Id.

According to Freud, the desire that is born of the Id is destined to give birth to the being of Id. First of all, the Id is the " dark, inaccessible part of human personality, striving to bring about satisfaction". Victor's quest for the forbidden knowledge of bestowing animation is firmly rooted in himself. He does not realize that there may be ill effects of an imperfect man wielding the powers of a perfect God. The being that comes from these forbidden powers is the Id-ridden Monster. The monster is truly unfortunate because he is " born", or " zapped" into life, and as Freud describes all newborns, completely Id-ridden. However, the monster cannot develop an Ego. Instead, he possesses the side of the Ego that will side with the Id against the Super Ego, which represents the wishes and rules of a society at large. What the monster does not have is a firm connection to the Super Ego, and this is the problem. Any connection the the monster may have had to the Super Ego, and therefore, humanity in general, is shattered when the De Lacey family rejects him. This shocks his psyche. The complete horror that he sees in the faces of the people that he loved and regarded as his " protectors" is too much for him to bear. His psyche snaps and all traces of the developing Ego

disappear. He vows to “ seek that justice which [he] vainly attempted to gain from any other being that wore the human form” Shelley 124). The Monster wants to get revenge against Victor, who is the reason that he lives on Earth. From this desire, the monster begins to form a death instinct, an idea that Freud began to develop late into his psychological career. “ The death instinct would thus seem to express itself- as an instinct of destruction directed against the external world and other organisms.” The idea that there is an instinct that is based in the hatred of other beings living in the Id is a perfect explanation for the Monster’s behavior in the conflict between Victor and his creation.

The second Freudian point that arises mid-novel is that there will always be a conflict between the creator and the created. The Monster is like Victor’s abandoned child. Victor’s revulsion and eventual desertion of the Monster are predictable. He had hoped that the “ new species” he would create would be a good species, superior to humanity, and what he got was a wretch made from hacked limbs and electrically charged. Victor’s abandonment makes the monster seek vengeance against his creator, telling him, “ Remember that I am thy creature, I ought to by thy Adam, but rather I am the fallen angel,” (Shelley 89). The Monster is comparing himself to Adam to make the point that God made Adam, and even through his indiscretions, God did not fully abandon Adam, like Victor left the Monster to his own devices. The Monster is telling Victor that he has made him into the Devil, “ whom thou (Victor) drivest from joy for no misdeed.” (Shelley 89). Victor drives the Monster away for the simple fact that he is incredibly

hideous. He derived that the monster was going to be a beast born into brutality, just because of the way that he looked, which, technically, was Victor's own fault. This made the Monster bitter and hateful towards the entire human species. He says, " what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me." (Shelley 89). He has gleaned that he will find no sympathy from humanity, so he decides to destroy the man that stuck him with it. He promises to take down, " Not only [Victor] and [his] family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of [my] rage" (Shelley 90).

Victor's basic nature causes him to revile the Monster. According to Freud, a creature with a fully functioning Ego that has connected to the Super Ego, would find a creature made of pure Id to be incredibly repulsive. Most people do not want to see the most negative aspects of themselves, so when these aspects incarnate appear before them, encased in something that they once idealized, Freud believes that the individual will leave behind those cemented examples of his or her own psyche. Victor's abandonment of the Monster is simply a defense mechanism of his ego, denial and suppression. If he can forget that he has created something atrocious, then he can live his life as he originally saw it and become the analogy of the Clockmaker to his Monster- " Create it and Leave it". However, it is very difficult for the denial principle to take its effect when the thing he is trying to ignore is stalking him across Europe, leaving a trail of dead loved ones in its wake. After Victor's abandonment, the Monster sinks his instinct of destruction into Freud. This idea is that there is an instinct that causes a human being to

become openly hostile towards organic matter and other beings. This explains the ever-growing pile of dead bodies that the monster leaves behind in retaliation to his creator's cruel abandonment.

The third and final Freudian aspect of human nature evident in Frankenstein is that human nature will lead to the eminent and eventual downfall of the species. Victor's hubris of Victor led him to create the Monster, who then succeeds in ruining his life. The mental injuries that Victor inflicts on his creation are the root of all this. He leaves his own creation to live in a world where he does not know about with people he knows nothing of, speaking a language he doesn't understand. This abandonment leaves such a scar on the monster's psyche that decides to torture the man that is responsible for his existence, and therefore, his pain.

In Freudian terms, Victor's Id was demanding the satisfaction of his curiosity about re-animating dead tissues. He indulges this curiosity, and Id gives birth to Id, in the form of the Monster. The Monster actually has an Ego in his possession, but it was not connected to the Powers that Be that make up the Super Ego, and so he could never become a functioning part of society. The Monster blames his lack of human qualities on his creator, Victor, because he created him to be hideous and disfigured and then abandoned him. The product of these feelings is the Monster's destruction instinct, which causes his Id to run rampant on his European killing spree. This murderous tear kills off most of Victor's friends and family, and so the product of his Id ruined the existence that his own Id was striving to cling to.

As a result of a dare, Mary Shelley wove a story that would come to encompass the darker reaches of the human imagination. Frankenstein is a story of life and death, and of the aspects of human nature that contribute to the endangerment of our fragile existence. The beginning of the novel exposes the fact that man is naturally curious, and upon closer examination, this curiosity is rooted in the Id. The Id is the part of human nature, which, according to Freud, holds all of our basic and instinctual needs and desires. The middle of the novel shows that there is always conflict between the creator and his creation. Freudian ideas connect this conflict to the Ego and whether or not the Ego sides with the Id or Super Ego. The end of the novel signifies Freud's belief that human nature will contribute greatly to the tale of the species' demise.